

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN MAIOLICA:
SELECTIONS FROM THE ARTHUR M. SACKLER COLLECTION
AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART'S WIDENER COLLECTION

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 10, 1982. This exhibition marks the first time in ten years that the National Gallery of Art's Widener Collection of maiolica has been on view and the first time ever that the Sackler Collection has been shown as a group. On September 5, 1982, in the National Gallery's East Building, approximately 80 pieces of sixteenth-century maiolica go on view until January 2, 1983.

Maiolica, tin-glazed earthenware sometimes adorned with metallic lusters, was made in Italy during the Renaissance and was used for functional purposes--dishes, plates, and pharmacy jars--as well as for ceremonial occasions and architectural embellishments. The decoration usually consists of religious and mythological themes and the borders are often filled with intricate geometric, botanical, or classical ornament. Such designs are created with a sharp pointed implement used to scratch through several layers of colored glazes to form an image.

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The term "maiolica" is thought to have been derived from "Majorca," the Spanish island through which many Islamic wares passed into Italy.

Many of the Widener pieces were produced in and around Florence as well as Gubbio and Deruta, areas known for metallic luster glazes. One particularly strong example is a dish from Deruta with blue and gold luster surrounding a portrait of a woman, one of a group of stock figures frequently used. Another Widener Deruta dish bears the coat-of-arms of the Medici family and is thought to have belonged to Pope Clement VII or Pope Leo X.

Urbino was another important center of maiolica production. A late sixteenth-century plate from the Sackler Collection with a central monochrome panel of a boy offering a goblet to an enthroned king is thought to have been inspired by Raphael's painted decorations in the Vatican Loggie. Maiolica painters often copied the drawings, prints, and paintings of contemporary artists.

Istoriato ware from Urbino takes its name from the narrative scenes that often completely cover its surfaces. A superb example from the Widener Collection is a small plaque by Nicolò da Urbino, one of the finest sixteenth-century maiolica painters. Nicolò, who worked for Isabella d'Este, is recognized for his strong sense of space, rich coloring, and gracefully modeled figures as seen in his interpretation of a plaque showing the Adoration of the Magi.

Typical of maiolica from Siena is a plate from the Widener Collection: the ochre background of the border design and lacelike scale and petal motifs cover the back of the plate. The central scene is Narcissus admiring his reflection in a fountain with scrolls, interlacings, and fantastic grotesques.

Deborah Shinn, working closely with the National Gallery of Art sculpture department, is guest curator for the exhibition and is writing a brochure to accompany it.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Engel, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.